

HOLLOW

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cross country skiing, Soldier Hollow benefits a well-balanced skier, one who can run the gamut of competition requirements ranging from aerobic training to technical skiing.

"It's a technical course — it follows the terrain," Aalberg said. "We haven't bulldozed out the course."

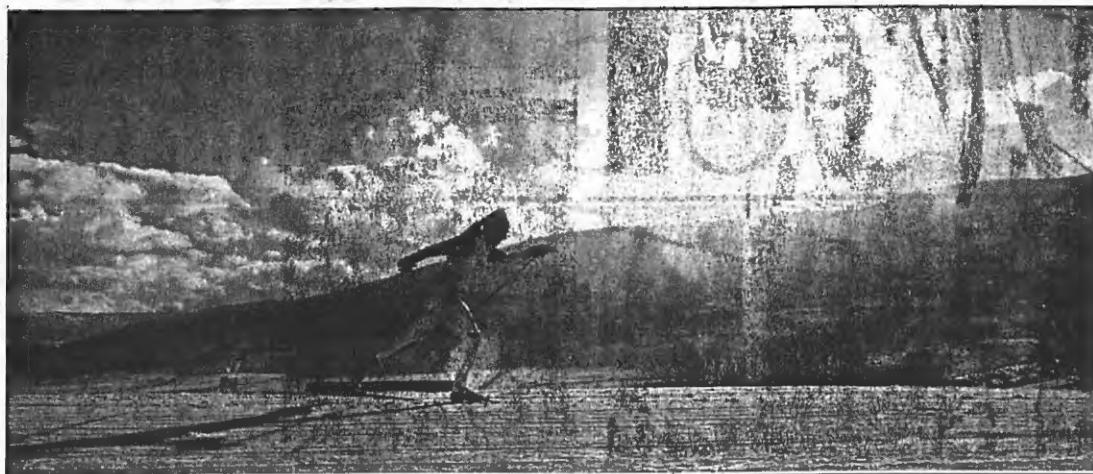
And it falls just under — by only a couple of meters — the maximum altitude allowed by FIS. The altitude allowances meant many other potential sites along the Wasatch Front — such as around Park City, where snows are much more abundant — were not feasible choices for development.

The still-up-there Soldier Hollow venue has many international skiers — particularly the Scandinavians — nervous about the Rocky Mountain highs for this week's World Cup and next year's Olympics. Remember, most of the Scandinavian countries — and much of Europe, for that matter — possess prominent stretches of seafrosts.

For example, the Norwegian national Nordic team — which often trains at or near sea level — can often be found training in "nitrogen houses," which help simulate high-altitude conditions.

Another of the most noticeable differences of the Soldier Hollow site from other cross country courses throughout the world is how visible nearly all the trails are to the spectator. At other competition sites and Olympic venues, cross country skiers can be seen at the start and at the finish, with only a momentary pass or two out from wooded areas during the event.

"You can stand here and see three-quarters of the race," said Aalberg, add-



U.S. skier Wendy Kay Wagner glides during the Ladies 5K Classic race during the FIS World Cup competition at Soldier Hollow Wednesday.

ing that "you can follow the last mile of the race — it's right in front of your eyes." And the entire 1.5-kilometer course of the sprints — a new event added to the Olympic program for the 2002 Games — will be in full view of the spectators.

Ironically, one of Soldier Hollow's perceived disadvantages by local organizers ended up aiding the sight-line advantages of the venue. The deciduous trees, such as the aspen and scrub oak, make the Wasatch Mountain State Park area a visual showcase for three seasons — spring, summer and fall.

But organizers were disappointed the leafy limbs would be long gone come time for the Winter Olympics. However, the bare branches resulted in enhanced visibility for the spectators.

"It was a disadvantage that turned into an advantage," said Nelson. "It actually opens up the view."

While the venue and the view of compe-

tion will wow the hard-core Nordic aficionados and the millions of followers throughout Europe, SLOC sports directors know they've got a tough local audience in the United States — one that eschews Nordic sports for fast-paced winter alternatives such as alpine skiing and ice hockey.

"These sports are boring if you're an American and you go to watch them," admits Lyle Nelson, SLOC's director of the Soldier Hollow venue and a four-time Olympian in biathlon, which combined rifle shooting with cross country skiing.

With their different sports backgrounds and personalities, the guarded, private Aalberg and more public-minded, outgoing Lyle Nelson have joined forces to create a rare venue, since Soldier Hollow is the first major venue to host both Olympic cross country and biathlon. Much of the operations facilities and equipment as well as the main area of spectator seating

is located in between the key locations of the two sports.

Cross country has its longer network of courses as well as its start and finish areas to the west of the competition center and stands, while biathlon has its shooting range, penalty loop and system of shorter trails on the east.

While Aalberg is focused on developing a premier Nordic course and hosting the best-ever Olympic and World Cup cross country competitions, Lyle Nelson looks at Soldier Hollow and the events as to their long-term effect on the sports.

In other words, Aalberg's dream is the best venue and best Olympics; Lyle Nelson's is for long-lasting legacy in cross country and biathlon.

"We want to make Americans aware and to invigorate these sports," Nelson said. "If we don't we may have lost our best opportunity."

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WAX

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other two waxes under extreme conditions.

"Within the various categories, there is a huge number of different waxes, ranging from a minus 20 degrees to temperatures up to 50 degrees. It's a real art these days to wax skis," adds Stowe.

Proper waxing has, in fact, passed from casual application to a science. The problem, of course, is that once out on the track there is nothing a skier can do about a bad wax job.

For freestyle or skating skis, skiers use a textured wax that is rubbed on the bases and then buffed with a cloth.

For classic or gliding skis, wax is melted onto the bases with a hot iron and then smoothed over the bases. The excess wax is scraped off and then the ski is buffed with a stiff brush or piece of steel wool to work the wax into the bases.

The better the quality of the skis, the more receptive they are to wax.

The job of waxing was expanded a few years ago when skating or freestyle skiing was introduced. For years, the classical or gliding style was all that was allowed.

Now there are two distinct events, requiring two different types of skis, and each requiring a different waxing technique.

Classic skis are usually longer, between 190 and 210 centimeters. These skis, too, may have a patterned base that allows them to glide forward easily but resist sliding backward.

The freestyle skis are shorter. They start at around 160 centimeters for women and 180 for men.

A number of ski shops offer waxing classes during the winter. REI, says Stowe, will hold three or four free classes on waxing.

And, for anyone planning a winter outing on cross country skis, what they'll find is that a good wax can make touring a whole lot easier and more fun.

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Cross country skiing glossary

What's in a name? If it's the name of a cross country event, you can get a good idea of the race's length, type and start, as well as the gender of the participants and the type of skiing technique they will use.

Take, for example, the men's 30-kilometer classical mass start. Most obviously, it's a 30-kilometer race for men. Skiers are limited to using the classical skiing technique. And since it's a mass start race, all skiers will begin at the same time at the starting line.

Techniques

● **Classical:** Also known as the diagonal stride, with the skier using a rearward kicking motion to move forward. Both skis stay in prepared tracks on the surface. On steep uphill segments of a course, a herring-bone step is allowed. Skiers use a kicking motion.

● **Freestyle:** Various techniques are allowed, with skating being the most common. Skating is keeping one ski in the track but pushing off to the side with the edges of the other ski. While it proved to be faster than the classical technique, international purists claimed it wasn't "traditional" and it was banned for some time in World Cup and Olympic competition during the 1980s.

Event types

• **Classical mass start:** was simply a race against the clock with individu-

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was the first Olympic Nordic skiing event, dating back to the inaugural 1924 Chamonix Games. It enjoys a special spotlight of one of only two events contested on the final day of the Winter Olympics, along with the men's gold-medal ice hockey game.

● **Women's 30 Kilometers:** Similar to the men's 50K in type of event and technique used.

● **Men's 4x10-kilometer relay:** Four men comprise a squad, with each skiing 10-kilometer legs. Rather than the staggered, time-interval

